

Layoffs hit black auto workers hardest

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force around the world.

In all, the so-called Big Three U.S. auto companies have cut or declared plans to cut almost 140,000 jobs since 2000. That is about one-third of the entire North American payroll. "This may not be the end, but it is certainly the beginning of the end of the automobile industry as we knew it," said Gary N. Chaison, a professor of industrial relations at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in an article in the New York Times.

The source of the problem for the Big Three is the worldwide crisis of overproduction in the manufacture and sale of automobiles. The result of this has been intensifying competition and declining profit rates.

As this competition has intensified, Ford and GM in particular have lost a significant portion of the U.S. market. At the same time, automotive manufacturing monopolies based in Asia have increased their share of the U.S. market to 31 percent last year.

All together, the share of the market owned by U.S. auto companies dropped to 58.7 percent last year, according to Autodata Corp. Chrysler - which is majority-owned by German automaker Daimler - is the only U.S.-

based auto manufacturing company that increased its share of the market last year, with a four-percent gain.

Azariah explained the impact this has had on production in Ford's Twin Cities plant. "With a line speed of 50 jobs per hour and a 40-hour work week, we produce 8,000 trucks a month per shift. We have two shifts, which equal 16,000 trucks per month. Over the last two months, Ford has only sold in the area of 8,000 trucks."

In making these big job cuts and plant closures, in addition to demands for wage and benefit concessions, the auto companies have announced their intention of taking this profit crisis out on their workforce.

"These are some difficult times working people will have to go through for the next decades," said Azariah. "They are going to come after everything they think they can get."

Mark Fields, Ford's new point person for their restructuring program euphemistically titled "The Way Forward," confirmed Azariah's predictions in comments made two weeks ago. Fields said that his goal is to put workers in a crisis mode.

In the face of these attacks, autoworkers across the country have begun to speak out

and take the first steps toward organizing resistance to the attacks. "For the first time in a long time, I see workers reaching out," said Tom Laney. Laney, who retired from Ford several years ago, worked at the Twin Cities plant for 31 years and served as president of the United Auto Workers union local 879 from 1984-87.

"Workers at Delphi have organized a national slowdown," said Laney, referring to workers at GM's auto parts subsidiary, who are currently fighting against concession demands from the company.

In order to convince union members to accept their massive concession demands, auto companies make the argument that workers should take cuts in wages, benefits, and working conditions to save the company and thus save jobs for some. However, Laney argues, "Our job as workers is not to save the corporation, but to save these poor people on the street!"

Laney explained what he considers necessary for working people to confront the crisis: "What's happening is that they are waging a war abroad and at home against working people. The only answer for the Auto Workers union is to build connections within the union and solidar-

ity between the union and the working people in the communities. The old idea of the labor movement was to fight for a job for everyone; I think the old idea is a good idea."

For Ford retiree Desi Arnaz Scott, confronting the challenges facing the union means finding a way to organize the unions in plants where it does not exist to take away the auto bosses' ability to drive wages, benefits, and working conditions down. "I want the UAW to come down here [in Mississippi] and organize Nissan," said Scott in an interview with the Spokesman-Recorder.

Scott was the second Black woman hired at the Twin Cities plant in 1973. She was also the first Black woman to retire from the plant, an accomplishment of which she is proud. She now lives in Benton, Miss., with her husband, who is also retired recently from Ford.

Scott discussed some of the problems she has in attempting to convince workers she knows who work at the Nissan auto plant in nearby Canton, Mississippi, to organize a union. "They make \$12 to \$13 an hour without many of the benefits I enjoy as a UAW member. When I tell them to get the union in the plant, they tell me, 'No.' The

company says that they will close the plant if we get a union."

The industry's crisis is having a disproportionately negative impact on Black workers. A study recently released by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, "The Decline in African-American Representation in Unions and Auto Manufacturing, 1979-2004," presents figures that outline the sharp decline in black employment in the auto industry.

In 1979, says the report, 12.1 percent of all African-American workers were employed in automobile manufacturing. By 2004, this share had fallen by more than one-third to 1.3 percent. By contrast, the share of white workers employed in auto manufacturing fell just 0.2 percentage points from 1.3 percent to 1.1 percent. The share of Hispanic workers also fell by 0.2 percentage points, from 0.8 percent to 0.6 percent.

This decline has taken place despite the fact that black workers still maintain a higher percentage of union members based on their numbers in the workforce. Says the report: "In 2004, African-Americans were still more likely to be in a union (16.6 percent) than whites (13.9) and Hispanics (11.4 percent). Nevertheless, the

decline in union membership for black workers between 1983 and 2004 was sharper for blacks (down 15.1 percentage points) than it was for whites (down 8.3 percentage points) and Hispanics (down 12.8 percentage points).

Local elected officials have negotiated with Ford in an effort to convince the company to keep the Twin Cities facility open. The main proposal officials have made to Ford has been to reconfigure the plant to make hybrid cars, with the state and city government picking up a good deal of the bill in the form of research and development monies, tax breaks, and other incentives.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty proposed that the State and Ford build a "Center of Excellence in Renewable Fuels." In his proposal, Pawlenty promised that the state would make "significant investments in this effort."

Azariah is not optimistic about the prospects of the plant staying open. "I think the fact that the Twin Cities plant was not mentioned [in the first round of closures] does not mean that we are out of the woods. All of the reasons that they gave for closing the other facilities all apply here, too."

Group forms to help black-owned S. Carolina businesses

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unified voice. Benjamin stressed the organization is not exclusive. "Membership is open," he said.

The group has a 25-member

board of directors. Currently, all are from the Midlands, with the exception of Pinson.

"We wanted to get a base in the Midlands and then go statewide," Benjamin said.

"We want to have a collaborative effort that is representative of the state. ... But being big is a not a goal."

OnStar debuts updated system

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he said it will be less than \$34.95 per month, which is what customers currently pay to access directions from OnStar. Customers pay \$16.95 (euro14.15) per month for OnStar safety features, such as an automatic call when the air bag deploys. Handsfree calling minutes are purchased separately.

Eighty-five percent of OnStar customers currently get only the safety package, while

15 percent get the directions package, Huber said.

Huber said Turn-by-Turn Navigation is less labor-intensive than the current system, which depends heavily on live operators. OnStar currently has three call centers, in Michigan, North Carolina and Ontario.

GM doesn't release separate financial data for OnStar, but company officials have said GM first started making money from OnStar in 2003.

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It Is Only Human

It may seem from so much that we learn about what it takes to be successful, that every day is to be a perfect day for us. We may get the impression that as we go about working to make our dreams come true that we should always expect to be upbeat, positive and enthusiastic.

There are times when we may even encounter others who are striving to be successful in life. They may have hit a snag in their plans. For example, they may be behind in achieving their goals. There may be days that they did not feel very positive about trying to achieve their dreams.

There are those who would say that you must always be positive and never let anything get you down. No matter what may happen in your life, according to them, you are not to skip a beat in the pursuit of your goals.

However, life really does not allow us to run our lives so smoothly. There are times when plans just do not go as we had planned. The unexpected comes into our lives and derails our

plans at times. We may become so disappointed when our friends cannot support us in ways that we had hoped.

When we experience such feelings, we may actually feel guilty for having such feelings. But the truth is that it is only human to feel disappointment, sadness and even discouragement at those times when we do not achieve as we had dreamed of doing.

The key, however, is to admit to our feelings but not allow them to get in the way of achieving our success. We cannot ignore these feelings. We must admit that we have them, deal with them and then move on, believing that the next day will be better. Once we express these feelings and realize that our disappointing situations are only temporary, we can take the steps we need to move on to success. When we realize that it is perfectly natural to feel disappointed at times, this will take us a long way along the road to success. *Remember, it is only human!*

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